

**THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP) in the
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (USACE)**

1. Purpose. To establish policy and guidelines for Communities of Practice that build, maintain and provide expertise and capability to accomplish the USACE mission.

2. Applicability and Proponency. This Engineer Regulation (ER) applies to all USACE elements and activities. The proponent for this ER is the Strategy and Integration Directorate (CESID). This is a living document which will be updated periodically. Submit changes to CESID.

3. Distribution. For public release, unlimited.

4. References.

- a. Army Regulation 25-1, **Army Knowledge Management and Information Technology**, June 2004
- b. **USACE 2012: Aligning the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Success in the 21st Century**, October 2003
- c. **Learning Organization** Doctrine, USACE, November 2003
- d. **Strategic Directions** Brochure, June 2005

5. Definitions. Appendix A provides definitions for the purpose of assuring a common understanding of key and essential terms among all USACE personnel, members of our Communities of Practice, and others who read this regulation.

6. Overview

The realization of USACE 2012 depends on four tenets: Operating as One Headquarters, operating as Regional Business Centers (RBCs), Regional Integration Teams (RITs), and Communities of Practice (CoPs). The Project Management Business Process (PMBP) culture we seek relies on cross-functional Project Delivery Teams (PDTs) to accomplish our work. Additionally, Automated Information Systems and a commitment to becoming a Learning Organization are key to achieving our vision: **One Team: Relevant, Ready, Responsive, and Reliable.**

The effective implementation of CoPs throughout USACE will support the communication, learning, and relationship development within the Corps team. The capture of intellectual capital and the use of lessons learned in applying corporate experience and expertise to solve problems will be enhanced by CoPs. All leaders of the Corps must support the CoP component of USACE 2012 to ensure the maintenance of our technical expertise. CoPs are employed across industry and DoD as well as other government agencies. The following definition of CoP is taken from AR 25-1.

Community of Practice (CoP)--is a group of people who regularly interact to collectively learn, solve problems, build skills and competencies, and develop best practices around a shared concern, goal, mission, set of problems, or work practice. CoPs cut across formal organizational structures and increase individual and organizational agility and responsiveness by enabling faster learning, problem solving, and competence building; greater reach to expertise across the force; and quicker development and diffusion of best practices. CoP structures range from informal to formal and may also be referred to as structured professional forums, knowledge networks, or collaborative environments.

Ideally, every USACE team member will be a member of at least one CoP.

7. Guiding Principles and Missions

To implement CoPs effectively, it is important to understand the fundamental CoP guiding principles and CoP missions as they are discussed below.

a. Guiding Principles

1. **Communities support the Corps mission**—Communities are created to support the Corps mission. They accomplish this by sharing, maintaining and building expertise of their members and by solving problems. Communities create synergy as members participate and share best practices.
2. **Communities are built on trust**—Trust is the foundation of any community. Trust manifests itself when people share their expertise because they know it will be used for the good of the organization and believe they will be recognized for their contributions.
3. **Communities provide value to their members**— The long term success of any CoP is dependent upon the value it provides to its members. That value includes personal growth and learning, the satisfaction of contributing, the benefit of helping one solve problems, the ability to influence and maintain situational awareness, and the recognition and satisfaction of contributing to something bigger than one's self. Each member participates to the extent that he/she realizes these benefits.
4. **Communities are engines of learning**—Communities exist to share, maintain and build expertise across the entire Corps. By bringing together the expertise of the entire community, that expertise affords an opportunity for learning by each member.

Communities serve as innovation hubs where ideas can be developed, tested, and shared. The community is a learning organization that learns from its experience. Communities are non-threatening and empowering entities in which each member can participate freely.

5. Communities are not bound by geography, organization or hierarchy--Each community is a clear example of "*One Corps operating virtually as a learning organization*". What is important to a community member in one district is important to a community member in another. Communities of Practice may exist outside the normal organizational structure and participation on the part of each member is largely voluntary.

b. Missions – Appendix B provides a crosswalk between the Mission Essential Task List (METL) and Sub-Tasks which support it.

1. Execute Community functional responsibilities—This mission has four tasks which support it. They are:

- a. Development and maintenance of policy and doctrine
- b. Plan and budget
- c. Advise the Chief of Engineers and other Senior Leaders
- d. Manage functional programs

Each CoP has at its core a functional office or entity in which there resides a set of functional responsibilities. The CoP revolves around this core, which supports the work and mission of the functional office or entity. These cores are the HQUSACE Directorates, Offices, and Teams defined in USACE 2012. The CoP Leader (functional entity Chief/ Director) addresses the resources and funding requirements as well as staff commitments. The CoP Leader may reach out across the community to support a specific project or mission.

2. Promote a Capable Workforce—Each community identifies skills, knowledge and capabilities that contribute to successful mission execution while looking forward and determining what will be necessary for members in the future. The CoP Leader serves as the USACE Program Manager for his/her respective Career Program as well as developing and validating national standards for CoP professionals.

3. Build and Maintain Relationships and Coalitions at All Levels—Communities may engage external partners on multiple levels. Communities may include members from outside agencies

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and stakeholders to the extent allowable by law and regulation. Communities may encourage involvement with related private, Non Governmental Organizations, and professional organizations and websites and publications, and participate on boards, committees, working groups and technical teams in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 11.c. and to the extent allowable by law and regulation. CoPs work with Federal agencies and national level private sector and professional organizations on mutual areas of interest.

4. Promote Organizational Communication—CoPs facilitate community-wide communication among members. This communication extends across all organizational and geographic boundaries and is not hindered by varying platforms. Members are positively identified and know how to communicate within the community.

5. Enhance Organizational Learning—CoPs will enhance the learning organization by enabling each of its members access to information in two ways. Communities maintain a Community Support Forum (CSF) as an **information repository** designed to make policy and doctrine, lessons learned, best practices, contact information and experience of members available. Communities also **maintain a collaborative worksite** where active learning is facilitated.

8. Community Implementation Guidance

a. Community Member Identification and Acknowledgement. Communities will identify each of their members to one another and their CoP Leader. Members are aware that they belong to a community and understand its operating procedures. IAW applicable regulations and laws, participation from outside USACE is encouraged.

b. Community-wide Communication Capability. Communities ensure that a community-wide communication vehicle (e.g. GROOVE) is available to each member. This communication tool must possess clear identification of its author to enable rewards for excellence and maintain discipline. This vehicle allows issues to be thrown into an arena where any interested party can address them with full visibility and the entire expertise of the community can immediately be brought to bear.

c. Community Support Forum. Each community sponsors a Community Support Forum (CSF). A Community Support Forum (e.g.

Website such as Engineering Knowledge Online(EKO)) allows issues to be captured and catalogued for all interested parties to access them for future use and reference. The entire expertise of the Community is leveraged on new issues and problems. This enables the Corps to react quickly to issues, leverage expertise and provide a learning environment for all members.

9. Communities of Practice and Project Delivery Team (PDT) Interaction

- a.** Communities of Practice support Project Delivery Teams. They accomplish this by developing and maintaining expertise of members and, most importantly, by providing each member the opportunity to access the cumulative expertise of the entire community. PDTs consist of members of various communities and a single member often represents the entire CoP on the PDT. This point of interaction is critical to the operation and success of both the PDT and the CoP.
- b.** The expectation for each CoP member is to provide value to the PDT by swiftly and accurately contributing the knowledge of his/her CoP. The CoP member will also communicate back to the CoP any shared knowledge and insight gained as a member of the PDT.
- c.** The goal is for each CoP member to be able to access the cumulative knowledge of the community through the Community Support Forum (e.g. EKO). The community-wide communication vehicle (e.g. GROOVE) provides an immediate platform for an individual member to leverage the expertise of the entire community on a single problem. It also makes the entire community aware of the issue, promptly facilitates discussion, and lends itself to readily arriving at a solution.
- d.** These CoP mechanisms yield advantages which allow individuals with no immediate involvement in an issue to observe and store that knowledge until a time when a similar issue arises in their area of responsibility. This approach to problem solving vastly increases the value of each member of the PDT, utilizes the expertise of the entire community with no increase in footprint, standardizes the approach toward issues, and facilitates learning throughout the Corps.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

- a. Commander, USACE** communicates strategic vision through policy and guidance to achieve mission success. Policies are flexible to allow communities to tailor their operations to support the Army and the Nation in the best manner possible. Senior Leaders lead, evaluate and facilitate the integration of communities throughout the Corps.

b. As an agent of the Commander and the Command Council, the **National Management Board (NMB)** helps ensure that policies are practical, consistently applied and based on best practices.

c. Commanders of MSC, Districts and Centers support and advocate communities by promoting this doctrine. Communities are vital to ensuring the development and maintenance of technical expertise that is critical to the accomplishment of the Corps mission. Support of learning that CoPs facilitate is essential to success.

d. Supervisors support communities by ensuring that their subordinates recognize that CoPs are engines of learning that develop each employee and enable the Corps to leverage expertise from across the organization to deliver quality projects and retain technical expertise. Supervisors recognize that communities operate outside normal organizational structures and that support and emphasis at all levels is necessary to ensure the success of communities. They recognize that membership in a community not only improves the entire Corps, it also enhances the skill and potential of individual members. They seek ways to encourage and facilitate participation in communities by their subordinates.

e. Program and Project Managers manage the work of the Corps. **PDT members** conduct the business of the Corps. They all recognize that CoPs leverage expertise from across the Corps and see the PDT members as CoP members who represent their entire community. PDT members take their obligations to the PDT seriously and work to leverage the advantages of the CoP to the successful accomplishment of the project.

f. Ideally, every **Corps Employee** is a member of at least one USACE Community of Practice. Community membership of an individual employee is a function of that member's expertise and interest. The community provides an important opportunity to the individual employee in his/her professional development. Individual employees may belong to several communities according to their interest. Each member is encouraged to actively participate in the community.

11. Management Control

a. Structure. Structure in a community should be kept to a strict minimum to avoid creation of barriers. Each CoP has a leader and a Core. If the community member interest is sufficient, then a **subordinate CoP (Sub-CoP)** may be created for specialized interest areas. The NMB will manage the establishment and maintenance of CoPs and Sub-CoPs. A Sub-CoP is a way to expand, migrate, and develop new expertise as well as husband current expertise in a specific area. A Sub-CoP should also have a leader. Leadership of CoPs and Sub-CoPs can reside

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anywhere within USACE. The appointment of Leaders will be sanctioned by the NMB. Participation from organizations and partners outside of USACE is encouraged within applicable laws and regulations.

b. Interoperability. While each CoP faces different challenges and will operate slightly differently to overcome these challenges, CoPs should develop and share common operating principles, consistent policy processes, and strive to promote participation, interoperability and a free flow of information among communities. Communication between CoPs is encouraged and all communities should be interoperable.

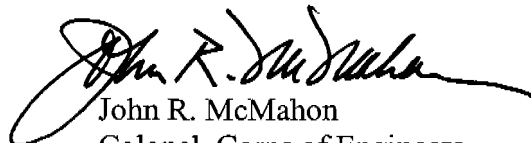
c. Security. All CoP members are responsible to ensure integrity of governmental operations, preservation of pre-decisional processes, independence from unauthorized outside influence, protection of national security, and coordination of positions outside the Corps. Applicable regulations will be followed in all cases.

d. Communications. Several community-wide communication vehicles are available at this time to fully support communities in USACE. Currently, Engineering Knowledge Online (EKO) is a capable platform for the Community Support Forum. Whatever vehicles and platforms are selected, they must support community wide communications and the Community Support Forum as outlined above. CoP Leaders will approve all websites relating to their communities and will be responsible for content.

e. Resourcing. The necessary financial support and investment needed to incubate, cultivate and grow CoPs will be provided in three ways: directly, through the investment in AIS (e.g. GROOVE and EKO) and application of other seed monies to set the necessary conditions for success; directly and indirectly, through the annual budget allocations to core functional offices and entities which are at the heart of each CoP; and, indirectly, through the contributions of CoP members to the CoPs (and PDTs) to which they belong. At District level, where the vast majority of our technical expertise resides, commanders, leaders, supervisors and resource providers must invest and underwrite the time their employees dedicate and contribute to CoPs. This will help us realize the incalculable benefits of mature Communities of Practice, operating virtually across the Corps, contributing directly to Project Delivery Teams, solving problems, and facilitating the retention and sharing of technical capital. All USACE leaders, supervisors, resource providers and managers are expected to fully support this approach.

12. Assessment

- a. The goals for all USACE communities are to identify their members, develop community-wide communications, and maintain a CSF as an information repository. These goals will be used to assess our progress toward implementation.
- b. The Strategy and Integration Directorate, through the NMB and other means, will annually assess Communities of Practice and assist CoP Leaders in sharing best practices, encouraging CoP development, and refining USACE CoP guidance.
- c. Community leaders are responsible for the long-term CoP success. Members will determine how effective the CoP is in reaching and providing value to its members. CoP leaders obtain, share, and collaborate among themselves routinely on best practices.



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APPENDIX A: Definitions

Capable Work Force: A set of skilled, knowledgeable, diverse, and high-performing employees working as individuals and in teams whose skills, abilities and expertise are leveraged to meet current and emerging demands of the mission; able to anticipate and respond to customers' needs, adapt to change, generate new knowledge and continue to improve their practice. This is achieved by assessing individual and organizational capabilities with a long-term, global view of the future, determining gaps, and taking appropriate and effective action to fill those emerging requirements. This also involves applying the best approaches on how we identify, achieve, and sustain needed capability and on how we manage knowledge to facilitate continuous organizational and individual learning and innovation.

CoP Leader: The leader provides high-level sponsorship and support for the Community. The leader promotes the value of membership across an organization, thereby encouraging CoP growth and commitment of organizational resources. The CoP leader is responsible for the functional and learning responsibilities of the community. He/She recognizes the differences in how these responsibilities are accomplished and encourages the best level of interaction between them. The leader believes in the value of knowledge sharing and commends participation in CoP activities.

Corps Communities: There are twenty-four communities in the Corps of Engineers. This number may increase or decrease over time based upon evolution of the concept and use of communities. Existing Communities are listed below.

Contracting	Corporate Information
Counsel	Equal Opportunity
Engineering and Construction	Environment
History	Homeland Security
Human Resources	Installation Support
Interagency/International Support	Internal Review
Logistics	Operations/Regulatory
Public Affairs and Communications	Planning
Project and Program Management	Real Estate
Research and Development	Resource Management
Small and Disadvantaged Business	Safety
Strategic Management	
Security, Law Enforcement, Intelligence and Force Protection	

Expertise: Knowledge, both explicit and tacit, and skill at a certain task or operation.

NMB: National Management Board: The National Management Board (NMB) will focus on internal policies, processes, and procedures that cross functional lines and regional boundaries, and that are important to our success in our delivery of products and

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services, including those issues dealt with by the various Regional Management Boards suitable for discussion at the national level. It will be a national forum for sharing best business practices from across USACE, with a secondary mission of recommending strategic initiatives and providing input on the impacts, resourcing needs, and processes (including relevant metrics) required for consistent implementation of strategies across USACE. The NMB, as the working arm of the Command Council, is a National Forum with a cross functional/regional focus toward RMB issues, venue for sharing best business practices, and the recommendation of strategic, re-sourcing, and process initiatives.

Project Delivery Team: The Project Delivery Team (PDT) is responsible and accountable for delivering a quality project to the customer. The PDT is empowered and supported by senior organizational leaders to make project decisions within the bounds of the approved Project Management Plan (PMP). The senior leaders are responsible to ensure that the team has the resources, tools, skills and experience needed to deliver a quality project. The PDT will expand to include all necessary expertise on a specific issue, and may include a vertical aspect encompassing division and headquarters. The Project Manager (PM) is responsible for ensuring that the necessary disciplines and perspectives are represented within the PDT.

Sub-CoP Leader: Experienced, knowledgeable, and senior-level USACE personnel throughout the Corps serve as Sub-CoP Leaders. They are selected by the CoP Leader. Sub-CoP Leaders perform the same role for their sub community as the CoP Leader does for the overall community.

**APPENDIX B: Community of Practice Mission Essential Task List (METL)
Crosswalk to Sub-Tasks**

METL	Sub-Tasks
1. Execute functional responsibilities	a. Develop and maintain policy and doctrine
	b. Plan and budget
	c. Provide advice to the Chief and other senior leaders
	d. Manage functional programs
2. Promote a capable workforce	a. Maintain an information repository
	b. Institute and maintain a community support forum that allows each member access to ongoing discussions
	c. Identify developmental opportunities at the Community and Sub Community level
3. Build and Maintain Relationships and Coalitions at All Levels	a. Continually elicit interested parties for community membership
	b. Include all interested individuals and stakeholders as members to the extent allowable by regulation
	c. Identify key relationships with stakeholders at Community and Sub-Community levels
4. Promote Organizational Communication	a. Identify and notify all community members
	b. Institute and maintain a community support forum that allows each member access to ongoing discussions
	c. Identify and utilize a single community-wide communications platform for community issues
5. Enhance Organizational Learning	a. Maintain an information repository
	b. Institute and maintain a community support forum that allows each member access to ongoing discussions
	c. Participate in policy and doctrine development
	d. Raise issues as they develop
	e. Identify and share educational opportunities with the community
	f. Identify key learning points within each Community and Sub Community
	g. Develop and maintain mission area policy and doctrine and support development and maintenance of USACE-wide policy and doctrine
	h. Provide clear and concise guidance